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SUBJECT Richard Allen and Bob Woodward Discuss Press Leaks

LESLEY STAHL: With us now, Richard Allen, former National Security Adviser in the Reagan Administration; and Bob Woodward, Assistant Managing Editor of the Washington Post.

Mr. Allen, you first. Do you agree with the Administration on the policy of trying to prosecute the press?

RICHAD ALLEN: I don't think the Administration so much has a policy of prosecuting the press. But it does have a policy of putting the press on notice, what it should and should not publish in this very narrow area of national security information. And I'm speaking now of signals intelligence.

So, yes, I do agree with this policy. I don't agree with persecuting the press. And I think it's important to make that distinction.

STAHL: Yes, prosecuting; no, persecuting.

ALLEN: Prosecuting in the same sense that if a citizen violates the law, he's taken into court and he has to stand responsible for his actions. In the same sense, so too must a newsperson if that newsperson breaks the law.

STAHL: Let's go to a newsperson, Bob Woodward.

What's wrong with what he just said?

BOB WOODWARD: Well, I think that they don't realize how careful we are. And in fact, we don't want to publish things that are going to do damage. And I don't think we have.

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STAHL: You don't. You disagree with what Secretary Weinberger just said.

WOODWARD: Yes. And I just asked him as he was leaving, is that the case? And, you know, he's without an example. And I think lacking an example, they have a problem. And that's why we're not on trial and why Mr. Pelton is.

STAHL: Let me show you both an article that appeared in the New York Times in 1975 that is on the very subject that Ronald Pelton is being tried for and is, in fact, the subject that NBC discussed in their report and the subject that Mr. Casey of the CIA forwarded to the Justice Department for possible prosecution. I've read this piece. There's infinitely more disclosure about the submarine intelligence gathering that this trial's about in this piece 11 years ago than NBC reported, and I believe Bob Woodward reported in the Washington Post.

I don't understand how a news organization can be prosecuted for merely printing what is already in the public domain. This is not a classified document, Mr. Allen.

ALLEN: Well, first of all, a lot of things have changed in 10 or 11 years. That article that was published, and without commenting on its accuracy at the time, even, was published at a moment when I think the Administration was certainly intimidated by the press. It was in the post-Watergate era. The first revelations apparently came in the Washington Post by Larry Stern. I think at that time not commenting was a good policy.

But the law doesn't address the question of when something was published. The law addresses the revelation of the information. And so if it's done now, today, or it's done that -- you also have made one important point that I have to respond to. Pelton obviously gave away much more than was contained in that article and that we're even learning about today in the trial.

STAHL: But this is what NBC revealed. That's all I'm talking about, what NBC...

WOODWARD: But the issue here is not the conduct of the press. I think there are people would like to say, "Let's look at the news media, prosecute them, focus our attention on the press." I don't think it's the issue here. I think intelligence gathering and the state of intelligence gathering right now is the issue.

And let's face it. The CIA and the Administration has a tremendous problem. Big important secrets are walking out the door. Mr. Pelton, who's on trial up in Baltimore, for $35,000, the price of a Mercedes -- not the big one...

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ALLEN: A small Mercedes.

WOODWARD: ...a small Mercedes -- gave away part of the store.

Mr. Howard, who was in the covert branch of the CIA, who also gave away secrets about human intelligence, gave away part of the store.

As we now know, kind of in that triad of intelligence gathering, the satellites can't get up.

We have got a serious problem.

STAHL: And is the CIA trying to deflect attention away from these mistakes that they've made in hiring these people, or what?

ALLEN: I don't think the CIA has made any mistakes. I think the CIA, under Bill Casey's leadership, is in a period of long, slow recovery from a previous period in which it was literally decimated. It began with the disclosures of Watergate. It went into the Carter Administration. At that point, human intelligence -- that is, the human side of our intelligence -- was literally decimated. And I can tell you...

WOODWARD: Well, wait a minute. You're saying Casey made no mistakes?

ALLEN: No, I'm not going to say Bill Casey didn't make any mistakes. I did say...

WOODWARD: Because he ackowledges that he made mistakes.

ALLEN: Of course he makes some mistakes.

I said that I think the human intelligence side is in the process of recovery, a long, slow recovery. This is not aided by the constant prospect of leaks, either from congressional oversight or micro-management, perhaps by at staff level. It's not helped that way.

We have certain sensitive secrets, Lesley, that must be maintained.

STAHL: The question is, is the Administration going after the press because we have seriously, honestly damaged national security? Or is it because the CIA has had these problems and they're trying to deflect attention?

ALLEN: Well, that's -- they're both part. They're both

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part of the problem. And I will defer to Bob. But I really believe that we've got to address both sides of this, the leakers and the leakees.

WOODWARD: We are so terribly cautious about this, in fact. I mean for five months we talked with people in the Administration about the Pelton case. And I tell you, what we published is a thimble of water compared to the ocean that he gave away. And that is the issue.

ALLEN: It is.

WOODWARD: And we're going to cover intelligence, we're going to write about it. And the Administration is not going to like here we draw the line. We have our own systems.

STAHL: Well, that's the question. Who draw the line?

ALLEN: That's a very important question.

STAHL: Who draws the line?

ALLEN: And I would say that the Washington Post and other news media can do a signal service by debating this issue without revealing vital national security information. It needs to be debated. It is the question of the status of our counteringelligence capabilities. It means that we have to go after it on both sides.

STAHL: But I have to come back to this article that was written 11 years ago. If you draw the line and say, we can't reprint something that was printed 11 years ago, we can't read the newspaper back to the public, I think that the agency loses some credibility.

ALLEN: Things are not the same today. Things are mu different from...

STAHL: Yeah, but they're drawing line.

WOODWARD: It's a very fragile business, gathering the intelligence. One line, one phrase, one misstatement by somebody can do irreparable damage. You've got to be very, very careful about that.

STAHL: Bob, let me ask a tough question of you. Who gives you the right to decide against the wisdom of the CIA on what to publish?

WOODWARD: We talk to the people about it and we make our own determination. The basic issue is, we have the First Amendment.

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ALLEN: And that's the problem.

WOODWARD: It's not the problem. It's the opportunity.

ALLEN: Well, the problem is that you get to draw the line all the time. But I would say in the case of this most recent disclosure, that the Post behaved in a very responsible way. You didn't satisfy the Administration...

WOODWARD: Oh, you really know how to hurt me now.

ALLEN: Oh, well, you know, a little praise never hurts.

STAHL: Were you upset when Mrs. Graham, your publisher, asked you not to print everything you wanted to in...

WOODWARD: That's not what happened. The President called Mrs. Graham and issued a caution and a warning. We went through our own debate. It's a touchy issue and we made a compromise, and I support that compromise.

STAHL: You do.

Gentlemen, thank you both very much. Wonderful debate.

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